



Vol. IV, No. 2

Published by the Student Government Association  
of Queens College, Charlotte, North Carolina



# ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

- The Whitest Poem Ever Written/*Martha Huntley*/5
- How to Catch Cave Men/*Lou Anne Garland*/17
- The Figure a Poem Makes/*Martha Huntley*/23

# FICTION

- Proof Positive/*Martha Watson*/7
- The Pattern/*Kay Davis*/11
- The Thirty-First of June/*Jane Trivette*/21
- The Sweetest Fish/*Angela Williams*/26
- World War II/*Marion Rogers*/39

# SKETCHES

- Brother Moses Goes to Town/*Angela Williams*/3
- On the Mississippi River/*Diana Ashworth*/15

# POETRY

- Reflection/*Ann Aldrich*/4
- Nationalism/*Susan Valloton*/10
- In Church/*Susan Valloton*/10
- Tag/*Dee Wedemeyer*/25
- Villanelle/*Sheryl Owens*/29
- The Peace We Take/*Sheryl Owens*/30
- No Pity/*Sheryl Owens*/31
- The Makers of Honey/*Sheryl Owens*/32
- Alex/*Sheryl Owens*/33
- Triolet: The Quarrel/*Sheryl Owens*/34
- Containment/*Sheryl Owens*/35
- Deceptive/*Sheryl Owens*/36

# ART

- Cover/*Lynn Vance*
- Branch/*Diana Churchill*/19
- Pen and Ink Drawing/*Brenda Blackwelder*/20
- Dogwood Leaves/*Lynn Vance*/37
- Pen and Ink Drawings/*Diana Churchill*/38
- Shells/*Brenda Blackwelder*/50

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## BROTHER MOSES GOES TO TOWN

Angela Williams

Every few weeks a dull green pick-up bobs its way down the worn dirt road leading to our farm-supply store in the middle of a small southern town. Brother Moses takes pride in coming in from the river plantation to load up with seed, feed, and fertilizer for the monastery, and his job is coveted, to say the least.

The truck sighs as the immense two hundred and fifty pounds struggles from under the wheel and finally hits the ground. A mass of gray stands up, brightened only by a thick, off-white rope stretched around its belly. He reeks of goodness-knows-what, but the Trappist order is famed for its strict rules—one of which requires the monks to sleep in their heavy habits.

Anyway, everyone loves Brother Moses and his grade A, extra large egg-head,—void of hair except for a narrow auburn ring of mustache stubbiness. A brownish-red beard covers over half his face, and his unruly eyebrows guard a set of delicate blue, yet excitingly vivacious eyes that reveal the true spirit within. Though all the townspeople recognize his uniqueness, few would imagine him an ex-convict. He lives with an order that stresses silence, so his rowdy laughter always amazes customers as he bounds into the office, thrusting a hunk of fresh Monk Bread on the main desk.

After trash-canning his written list, he slaps his huge, hairy hands together and throws his head back deliberately. Eyes leaping with freedom, he bellows out an order for four hundred pounds of chicken pellets, ten mealcakes, and eight sacks of 4-10-5 fertilizer.

Next, Brother Moses gathers in his massive arms the newspapers and magazines lying around—old and new—and marches towards the cramped workers' bathroom, where he stays for almost three hours. (That monks are to know *nothing* of goings-on in the "world" is an injunction that plagues him not in the least.) Finally, out he struts, talks vigorously with all and sundry for another hour or so, then stuffs himself under the wheel again.

Now, heading for the river, a beat-up truck passes through the streets of a quiet little town. And, just inside the coupé a saintlike monk, with lowered eyes, respectfully nods to the many passers-by who shout greetings. *Everybody* knows Brother Moses!

## Reflection

A world in angel hair, mangled and finally torn away on the winds  
of experience and time . . .

In which a crisp, chill autumn is warded off by a soft new sweater,  
a fire, a kiss . . .

In which a human being—no less me—is invoking rapture to the point of  
ethereal sensual gratification without the earthiness of bodies entwined . . .

In which a friend is almost important, almost needed, almost  
loved . . .

A world in angel hair, mangled and finally torn away on the winds  
of experience and time.

—ANN ALDRICH

# The Whitest Poem Ever Written

Martha Huntley

"We were deliciously preoccupied with things—nice, concrete, exquisitely pretty things which do not rend or bite you like emotions or ideas, but are openly for adornment and the augmenting of natural charms."<sup>1</sup> So writes Nancy Hoyt, describing herself and her older sister Elinor. In reading both Elinor Wylie's biography and her poems, one has more than anything else a sense of the poet's good taste. Her lines are spare and firm; her images, concrete and effective; her words, chosen with exquisite care. Hers is the poetry of one "accustomed to . . . the best books" and "nicest tea gowns."<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of one of her poems, Louis Untermeyer says, "Never has snow silence been so remarkably projected as in *Velvet Shoes*, perhaps the whitest poem ever written."<sup>3</sup> In this poem, one sees clearly the good taste of the poet. Every image is concrete and clear, yet each one is beautiful in itself, and each adds to the effectiveness of the poem, by creating in line after line a more complete white silence.

The word white is used five times in four stanzas, to describe snow, lace, cow's milk, down and silence. The very first image presented is "white snow," and the last, again, is

snow—but more dazzlingly white than the mere word white can make it, because of the repetition of the word in the stanzas between.

The first stanza whispers with s's:

Let us walk in the white snow  
In a soundless space;  
With footsteps quiet and slow,  
At a tranquil pace,  
Under veils of white lace.

The whispered s's, the words "soundless space" and "quiet", and the suggestion of walking under "veils of white lace" result in a muffled sound and picture, so that the reader's ears and eyes are aware at the same time of white and soundless space.

The s's continue in the next lines. Each image is softer than the one before:

I shall go shod in silk,  
And you in wool,  
White as a white cow's milk,  
More beautiful  
Than the breast of a gull.



We shall walk through the still town  
 In a windless peace;  
 We shall step upon white down,  
 Upon silver fleece,  
 Upon softer than these.

Wool is frequently softer than silk; milk than wool; the feathery breast of a white bird more than milk; down more than feathers; fleece more than down, and the poet says "We shall walk . . . upon softer than these." Softer than these! The reader's sense of touch is drawn by the thought of the soft silk and wool, feathers, fleece and down, and touch intensifies the other senses. Though white is used only twice in these lines, it is the essence of white: milk from a white cow, what a lovely and totally white thought,—extended by the gull's breast, and the fleece! Then the hush produced by the sibilants deepens in the phrase "windless peace." Not even a light wind will mar this snowy, "soundless space."

The last stanza leaves off where the first began, yet because of the combined touch, sight and hearing produced in the senses by the words and images between first and last stanza, the "white silence" is white, is silent, and is beautiful beyond anything the first stanza alone could describe:

We shall walk in velvet shoes:  
 Wherever we go  
 Silence will fall like dews  
 On white silence below.  
 We shall walk in the snow.

Now the walkers' footfalls, like the soundless silence of falling dew, are completely quiet. The reader would have to strain to imagine the soundlessness of velvet upon snow, but the poet, by comparing it to the silence of falling dew, makes the snow-and-velvet image possible to imagine.

The poem, all hush and white, quiets the mind with its images, although on analysis it seems elegantly bare, or simple. It is clean, almost austere, and reflects the poet's sense of perfection, her Puritan sense of beauty. In *Puritan Sonnet* she describes this taste of hers—"I love the look, austere, immaculate,/Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotones."<sup>4</sup> And if there is little humanity and less warmth in this and many other of her poems, the reader must realize that Wylie is a poet who "quite often valued fine porcelain above humanity"<sup>5</sup> and valued lovely living rooms above husbands for honeymoons.<sup>6</sup>

The heart of much, and certainly the early, poems of Elinor Wylie is "the hard heart of a child."<sup>7</sup> In speaking of beauty, the poet pleads, "Say not of Beauty she is good,/Or aught but beautiful."<sup>8</sup> The whitest poem ever written is a beautiful poem—smooth, hushed, filled with exquisite words and images, and the exquisite taste of the writer who selected them.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nancy Hoyt, *Elinor Wylie: The Portrait of an Unknown Lady* (New York, 1935), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry* (New York, 1962), p. 272.

<sup>4</sup> Elinor Wylie, "Puritan Sonnet," *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> Hoyt, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> Elinor Wylie, "Beauty," *The Oxford Book of American Verse*, edited by F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1950), p. 697.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

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## PROOF POSITIVE

Martha Watson

Marion was the biggest nut about taking pictures. She really embarrassed me when we first got to Washington, running around with her camera, looking exactly like the all-American obnoxious tourist, snapping pictures of everything and punctuating each snap with a radiant, rabbit-toothed grin. After transferring to film all the common things like the Library of Congress and the White House, she started on the school and her friends—or maybe I should say acquaintances; Marion didn't have a lot of friends.

I can't blame the kids too much for not having been friends with her. I never would have myself except that she was my roommate, and I guess because I knew she wanted to be my friend. It's not that Marion was diseased or had bad habits or anything, she was just not the effervescent, typical teenager that today's social situations seem to expect and demand. In fact, the first time I saw her she looked like somebody's Mother. Actually her face wasn't so mature—but she was quite tall, slightly stoop-shouldered, and dressed in a rather pretty but decidedly matronly peacock blue dress. And those ugly squash heels—black! Her long neck was accentuated by a strand of limp pearls and topped by the roundest head I've ever seen. This ball was covered with a nondescript brown growth, certain clumps of which were frizzy on the ends and suggested a long ago attempt at a permanent wave. Big, bright blue glasses magnified her eyes and hid her eyebrows. Those glasses literally must have dominated her face, as I don't remember noticing anything else about it for the longest time.

When I did take note of Marion's features it was for a purpose—to see how they could be improved. By this time I had become Marion's idol, and was determined to do my best by my idolet. I began with a good haircut and some jumbo rollers which I manipulated into the correct position on her

head for the month it took her to learn to do it herself. The next major improvement was a pair of prescription sunglasses to replace those bright blue nightmares, followed by a lesson in eye-makeup. Merle Norman's cosmetic studio took it from there, and within a week the idolet emerged as a definitely acceptable and at times really exceptional looking young lady. She posed for countless pictures of the new Marion, and spent hours crowing over her before-and-after display which replaced the books on her desk. I know she sent copies to every relative and friend she'd ever had, labeling them with a careless "Just love—D. C. Wish you were here", or a flippant "This is the new Marion in front of the old Lincoln memorial." The pictures appealed to her even more than a mirror, which seemed strange to me, until I remembered what she'd said, one of those first days, in answer to my query why she had so many pictures of her family and friends with her, especially boys, and of her favorite places. "Why," she'd answered with a slight frown at my lack of understanding, "to show people that they're *real*. Pictures are proof positive!"

An expected by-product of any new look for any woman is a man. For several weeks the idolet and I waited for the boys in seminar or around the dorm to take notice and ask Marion out. Nothing happened, though, and after about a month, Marion became resigned to spending her weekend nights with Matt Dillon and Lassie, and her weekend days working on her photo album. One Friday afternoon she came in late from downtown and casually asked if I'd do her hair for her, as she was going out that night. I screamed the usual "Who with, How'd you meet him, and What's he like" in one breath, and ran to hug her. As I created my most alluring hair style on her round head, she supplied the details. "His name is Nazmi Arda," she began, "and he's from Jordan."

"From Jordan!" I shouted, rattling her hair with such vehemence that she winced at me from the mirror. "Where on earth did you meet a *foreigner*? But I'll bet he's fascinating. Who introduced you?"

"Well," Marion paused, dropping her eyes and avoiding my rapt gaze. "I met him on the bus and we introduced each other." Picking up speed she continued, "But, idol, he's so neat, really! He has a little mustache and big brown eyes. He's a little shorter than I am, but that doesn't really matter, does it, idol? I can wear flats tonight, can't I?"

Marion's voice revealed both exultation in her conquest and fear that I wouldn't accept him. I just could not say to her all the things I should have, about strange men in big cities and naive preacher's daughters. I just couldn't, —so I nodded and waited for more details. Apparently they had gotten to know each other fairly well that afternoon. He'd taken her out for coffee and they'd talked for some three hours about Jordan and Nazmi, America and Marion. Nazmi was on his way to California to study agricultural techniques to take back home, and, as could be expected, he was lonely in Washington, where he knew no one, and where he would be for three more weeks. This sounded promising and even appealing to me, as it did to Marion. After all, she's bigger than he is, I concluded silently, and voiced my approval of the date.



Marion went out that night with Nazmi, Saturday night, and Sunday, and during the next week several times as well. The next weekend was a study in togetherness for them, and by Sunday night, Marion was mailing pictures of Nazmi and Marion to anyone who would have any reason to be interested. At the end of the next week she was reading books on Jordan, and asking advice on how to tell her Mother that Nazmi was a Hindu. I waited until I found "Mrs. Nazmi Arda" written in her book margins before I gently told the idolet that she was out of her mind, and asked if Nazmi had ever mentioned such a thing. She dreamily overlooked my question, wondering for the fourth time if I had seen the toy camel Nazmi had given her.

On the night before Nazmi was to leave Washington he and Marion planned to "do things really right" as Nazmi put it, which I warily interpreted as to go out on the town. Marion looked the best I'm certain anyone had ever seen her look, and, of course, half of her beauty came from her happiness. As a going away present she had gotten Nazmi a book on America that showed her past and present in beautiful graphic detail. Nazmi had hinted that he had something for Marion, as well, and if I suspected a ring I'm certain the idolet must have too. I waited up for her until past two o'clock, when I fell asleep, but woke up when she came in and whispered, "Idolet! What was it? What did he give you?"

"Pictures," she returned, so softly she was barely audible. "Pictures of Jordan."

"Oh Marion, and you love pictures so much. How nice!" My enthusiasm was more relief than anything else, and I switched on the light with a "May I see them? Oh, Idolet . . . don't cry. He'll be back someday." I tried to comfort her as I saw by the harsh overhead light that Marion's round cheeks were covered with mascara-streaked tears. She handed me the most unusual photo album I've ever seen—very small, and covered in jeweled leather. On the first page was an inscription which read, "May God watch for you until we are together again", and on the second and third pages respectively were the only two pictures in the album. One was of a small, dark, plump woman, and the other of seven small, dark, thin children.

## Nationalism

Fiery patriotism  
Dropped in my lap by war  
What am I to do with you?  
Up and begone; you are heavy,  
And my skirt sags.  
Leave! I have to rock my child.  
And you might bite him.

—SUSAN VALLOTTON

## In Church

All is silent, yet racing through the spheres  
My mind climbs up on the organ and laughs.  
I dance and dance—they gape in wonder.  
How good I am! I should be in the Rockettes  
not in  
Church.

—SUSAN VALLOTTON



## THE PATTERN

Kay Davis

"You just grew too fast—that's all. You won't be so chunky in a couple of years." Mrs. Wyedegger, the seamstress, said it out booming for everyone to hear.

The blurred roomful of people tittered. Hersha longed with all of her six-year-old strength to tear out of there. She considered ripping off the bluish, wadded monstrosity of a garment, with its prickly pins and rustling pieces of pattern still attached in places. Instead, she puffed her cheeks balefully and let Mrs. Wyedegger thrust her arms up for the fitting of the bodice as she would adjust clock weights. Hersha let on that she saw nothing about her; only a point in space through the open window.

Mrs. Wyedegger, aided by Hersha's grown sister, worked dexterously. She sometimes yanked the basting loose for several inches, or pinned a place from the underside, screwing her face up like a monkey's in her exertion. This was all that filtered through to Hersha, at first. Except that the woman, when pinning up the hem, sat girlishly cross-legged. When she stood, Hersha could have buried her face in the womanly, and somehow comforting, apronless stomach. Eventually, it occurred to Hersha that Mrs. Wyedegger wore a black dress with fluttery blue and other color butterflies all over it. The white collar of the dress reminded Hersha of a horse collar, and there were grinning bits of fluted lace at the sleeves. Hersha distrusted grins.

*"It doesn't matter. C-h-i-v-r . . . no . . . C-h-e-v-r-o-l-e-t.* On top of Old Smoky. *I don't care.* On top of Old Smoky. I can spell Chevrolet. I can 'cut off my fingers' with a piece of string, too." And she went through the process mentally. "You take a long string and tie a knot in it. You slip your hand inside the string like a mitten. *I don't care.* Then you take your other hand up under the string this way, and twist it over all your fingers—a ring for each finger. I wish I had a string! You just can't remember unless you do it. Some way, it looks like you're tying all your fingers together in a hard knot. Then you slip the string over your thumb and pull one loose end real sudden and real hard, and it's just like unravelling a flour sack!"

Finally, Mrs. Wyedegger wound her limp tape measure back into its round case. She had to do it as she would raise a faulty window shade, by pulling toward her a little bit at a time. At first, Hersha had thought it was a yo-yo, a pretty one, with tiny pink and white carnations on it. Rising to her knees, Mrs. Wyedegger turned Hersha about by the shoulders and adjusted her chin so that they were both gazing into the mirror on the scarred wardrobe door.

"Good grief," Hersha thought in desperation, "is that *me*?"

For a moment, she felt her unbelieving eyes riveted to the reflection—the reflection of what was surely someone else who had stepped into the room a minute and would hurry away presently. But the swell of being which occupied the lower front of the glass did not go—it stayed stubbornly there, as unblinking, as agape, as dismayed, as she herself was.

"How do you think you're going to like your new dress?" Saradee, her grown sister, asked, as she half rose from her chair to brush some threads off the skirt. She looked at chubby Hersha a little more critically than usual. (It was customary for Hersha's four older sisters and brothers to treat her as their comic side-kick. In her robustness, her droll solemnity, and, somehow, in her very vulnerability to their teasing and their laid-off blame, as well as her genius for getting into numerous scrapes of her own, she had all the makings of a family eccentric.) But Saradee smiled, and her sister's smile was the most natural and familiar thing Hersha knew. Right now, it didn't matter to her that Saradee might well be pretending some of her Christian sweetness. Little Dainty said she pretended it all the time. Little Dainty was Hersha's other big sister. She and Hersha's big, curly-headed brothers told Saradee she was a hypocrite. But, incautiously, and mostly on faith, Hersha sided with Saradee. She was Saradee's sworn friend, like a Little John or Maid Marian.

Prodded by Saradee's smile, Hersha tried again to see herself objectively in the mirror. The dress was blue chambray in a sun-back style. Underneath the bolero were wide straps like paper-doll tabs. The skirt gathers started high on her middle and emphasized it—made her front side bow up. In a way, she looked like the tubby bear in one of A. A. Milne's poems. Two bruised, sturdy legs showed from below the skirt.

"Well, do you like it?" Saradee was repeating. "Do you think you'll wear it when it's finished?" Experimentally, she gathered Hersha's back hair off her neck in a short ponytail. Hersha looked at the ravelled edges of the sleeves, and then over her shoulder at the unhappy reflection. She emphatically did *not* like the dress.

But she mumbled, "It's all right, I guess."

Mrs. Wyedegger wriggled the bolero off her and took it to the machine. She treadled it energetically for a minute, leaning her arm on the table part as she did so, her head very close to the needle. When she had finished, she bit the thread in two.

"I'll bet *she* gets lots of country butter and ham and biscuits, doesn't she?" someone asked. Saradee nodded with a look of indulgence at the asker, and a look, this time, of exasperation at Hersha.



Once more ashamed, Hersha stopped pondering her reflection. She concentrated fiercely on the spots of the mirror where the silvering had begun to peel off. In a broken place you could see the brown pasteboard backing. Accidentally, her eyes accosted someone—a woman in a pink crinkle-crepe slip. She was waiting to be fitted. The broken place obstructed part of her neck and hair and all of the expression of the child in her lap. But Hersha could see the child's spindly legs jiggling in impatience. At Hersha's wooden glance, the woman snapped her half-open mouth closed and began to examine the back of her arm.

Suddenly, aching, Hersha wanted Little Dainty. She could feel a spell of liking her coming on. Never would she have said so in a thousand years; somehow, it wouldn't have been quite fair. But, even though Little Dainty was disagreeable lots of times, she looked like Dale Evans, and she was the truly sympathetic one. Everyone said she used to be a fat little girl, too. She knew the secret of being slender. If only Hersha could learn it!

"Little Dainty'll know exactly what's wrong when I get home, and she'll try to help me! *She* doesn't scold me all the time for overeating. Like last time, she'll make up a game we can play, and she'll encourage me to eat the right things!"

Mrs. Wyedegger was discussing the pattern with Saradee. They stood close together and held it between them. Hersha knew that envelope all too well. On its back was something like the multiplication table, and on its front were sketches of three *slender*, neat little girls. The one at the top left hand had short red hair and bangs, and wore a yellow version of the dress, without its jacket. She was jumping rope, and there were red and blue tulips and green shoots of grass around her feet. In one or two places, the white scallops of her petticoat showed.

The other two were more sedately dressed—the one with long yellow hair, as though for church, in a wide-brimmed hat with fluttering ribbon, and with white gloves and pocketbook. She had a navy blue duster on over a corn-flowered version of the dress. The last little girl had black hair that was French-braided in loops, and hung like lollipop handles on either side of her head. She wore what appeared to be a froth of soft orchid material with eyelet embroidery on its skirt, and a very full crinoline underneath. She was blindfolded and had a donkey's tail in her hand.

Until now, Hersha hadn't thought much about the three models on the envelope. All she remembered of buying the pattern and the cloth and buttons and thread at Fineberg's, was, that she had dreaded the prospect of standing still, even for one minute, to be measured and fitted. In her worst dreams of this project, she hadn't considered that she would be so much in any sort of limelight. Assuredly, and as much as she had protested to her Mama and Saradee and Little Dainty, she hadn't foreseen this unpleasant showdown in the mirror. But, inwardly, secretly, she had caught herself saying, "I want to look like the one in the party dress!" Or "No—I guess I'd rather be the one skipping rope." If anything, she had been choosing which normal, slender life she wanted, not which dress. Now she hated those three little girls, with a dull, uncomfortable hate.

"You just grew too fast—you grew too fast—too fast." The words were like the growing din and stomping of a lynch-mob.

"*I don't care. 'Oh, Froggie went a'courtin' and he did ride' . . . it doesn't matter. I'll look all right in my regular clothes.*"

They wriggled her out of the dress-part, too, now. And Saradee pulled Hersha's own dress on over her flailing, eager arms. It was a faded, yellow one, with a faded brown sailor collar. The collar was the best part; it was usually wet near the piping and the little yellow anchor insignia, where she sucked on it, especially during adding drills in Miss Spooner's first-grade class. The front of the dress was straight, and the back was conservatively gathered from the neck. There was what you might call a sash—it buttoned, though, instead of tying—two clear plastic buttons, no ends fluttering down.

Hersha saw her accustomed reflection, moved her eyes to the short, thin braids joined over the top of her head—and the narrow width of whitish-yellow ribbon that never stayed tied. She straightened and smoothed herself with dignity, feeling as relieved as Little Lulu in the funny papers would feel to find herself back in *her* old long-sleeved red dress.

As they left the room, she still had not pieced together the missing jigsaw part of the faces in the mirror. But she smiled wanly toward the jiggling legs; she hoped, with Christian sweetness.

Afterwards, she had a fleeting impression, as they closed the screened door with Mrs. Wyedegger's advertisement on it behind them, of the woman in the mirror, standing with her arms upraised, and a dress over her head of lovely, light-green voile.

"*It doesn't matter.* You know, if I had a string, I could make a 'broom,' too, and a 'cup and saucer' and what else, oh—a 'Jacob's Ladder,' and out of that, a 'Joseph's Coffin'."

"But I always forget," she thought angrily. "I always forget from one summer to the next."



# On The Mississippi River

Diana Ashworth

The store was small. It was just a typical building that you would find on the outskirts of any town. It had the indelible stamp of being handmade. By its design, it reflected an older era. Part of the roof jutted over the gravel driveway and was supported by the structure above two round gasoline pumps. Never had I seen any pumps like this before. Slender, glass, and full of pink fluid, they helped to complete the setting. Leaning against the outside wall was a ladder-back chair. A yellow-brown dog was sleeping shiftlessly beside it. On the screen door was one of those signs—"Eat Sunbeam Bread for Your Health," or "Drink Dr. Pepper at Ten, Two, and Six." Opening the screen door, which tinkled a bell, we stepped inside over a well-worn but clean floor. On it rested two large feet in heavy brown shoes. A well-pressed white apron was wrapped around the large frame of a man. A smile dominated his entire face.

"Well, come on in! Just make yourselves at home. If y'all need anything you don't see, just ask me for it!" He was ready to say something else, when a car drove up and tooted the horn. "Well, excuse *me*, folks," he said. "I'll be back in just a minute." He untied the strings of his apron, took it off over his head, and placing a brown service-station cap on his head went out to service the car. He was back in no time, putting his apron on again. I looked around. It seemed he had everything you needed. I ran my fingers across the top of a tin can—no dust. While talking with him, we mentioned how much we liked this section of the country.

"Oh, this is the 'Heart of the South.' Yes sir, this is the finest place to live in the United States! The climate is just about perfect, and the people are mighty friendly. My neighbor down the street was just passing through ten years ago, and everybody made him feel so welcome that he just settled down here. Yes sir, I was born and raised right here. I've walked over every inch of this countryside. My pa and me fished on the Mississippi together. And, of course, all us kids grew up on Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. You know, I even had a flatboat. It outdid any other homemade raft around.

It was a beauty. I put every piece of it together myself. I loved every plank and nail in it. My pa didn't particularly like the idea of me floatin' down the river, but he let me do it anyway. I met my wife right here at one of those church picnics. We sure had one thing in common—we both loved the River. We spent many afternoons together makin' our plans floatin' down that Mississippi. She and I set up this grocery soon after we first were married.

"Speakin' of groceries—what do y'all need? Crackers? Right over here. Ham? I'll get it for you!

"See this hole in the floor? That's where my boy tried to start a fire by rubbin' two sticks together. It reminds me of the things I used to do when I was a kid. Every scratch and hole in this place has a story to tell. We built it ourselves, years ago. It's made from trees that grew right around here. Everybody helped. The women kept fixin' food and the men kept hittin' nails. It didn't take long. Before I could know it, my wife had all those frilly curtains at the windows. Those really were the days! Everybody always had fun. Life's too fast nowadays. Y'all should see the like of cars that pass this place, and the hurry they're in!

"I sure do wish y'all could meet my wife, but she's gone home for the evening. She runs the store during the day, and I'm here in the evening.

"Well, are y'all sure you've got everything? Let me see—I'll just add it up. That'll be \$3.15. Sure did enjoy y'all's company and business! I could talk all night but I guess you can tell that. Maude, that's my wife, says that I can bore people with all my talk—how 'bout that?"

Next day we stopped there again, for a different reason, and heard:

"Good morning! That'll be three dollars an' five cents. This is one of the most beautiful bridges over the most popular river in the United States. If you look hard enough, y'all might be able to see ol' Tom Sawyer floatin' down it.

"By the way, how was your food last night? Don't y'all remember who I am? Maybe you don't, with this uniform and cap on. I'm the man who sold you your groceries last night.

"Remember to keep it under twenty on this bridge!—I'm the sheriff, too."

# How To Catch Cave Men

Lou Anne Garland

All advice columns say that the first step in attracting a boy is to be where the boys are. But to me, at age seventeen, being where the boys were presented peculiar problems. Nearly all the males I was interested in were spelunkers: in other words, they spent most of their time crawling around in caves. Getting into a cave where these boys were was hard enough; attracting them once I got there was even more of a problem. For the benefit of anyone else who may want to attract a spelunker, I will offer advice learned from my own hard experience. If you have reached the point where you have actually persuaded your friend—let's call him Jack—to take you spelunking, I can divide my advice into two parts: "what to take" and "what to be impressed by."

## What To Take

First of all, you must take other people. Don't ask, don't even hint that you and Jack go into his cave alone. Being a cozy twosome in a dark, secluded place may sound wonderful to you, but it would terrify your friend, if he's a good spelunker. If you should mention such a thing, he would explain in a patient solemn voice that any good cave is a dangerous cave, and that it is absolutely foolhardy to take less than three or more than eight people into such a place.

When you are reconciled to *group* activity, the next thing to consider is what to take in the way of clothes. You would like Jack to see you in your most becoming slim jim outfit, but this is impossible. Caves are cold, wet, and filled with mud; you must dress accordingly—usually in heavy jeans, a thick sweatshirt, tennis shoes, something to protect your hair from the dirt, and everything the older the better. Of course you will look like a refugee in this outfit, unless you have all the physical attributes of a Gina Lollabrigida. But your clothes aren't really that much of a problem. Caves are so dark that Jack couldn't see how terrible you look, anyway (or how good Gina would look, for that matter). And when you get back outside, *everybody* is well plastered with mud—just a walking glob of peanut butter.



One of the best things to take cave-exploring, if you really want to impress Jack, is an abundance of food. Needless to say, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach—especially if the man spends most of his time outdoors and has neither the time, equipment, nor the energy to prepare large, delicious meals for himself.

### What To Be Impressed By

Properly prepared and dressed, you have entered a cave for the first time. Perhaps, painted on a nearby wall, you will see something like NSS #278. This means that you are in a cave that has been explored, charted, and catalogued #278 by the National Speleological Society. Be impressed (especially if Jack is a member)—because you are in a Real Cave.

If you are in a Real Cave, you will see stalactites and stalagmites. These are formations only to be viewed, otherwise avoided. And there is a definite difference between the two terms. Stalactites are the hanging formations you crash your head against when you stand up after a long crawl; stalagmites grow from the floor up, especially so you can trip over them.

Also in a Real Cave you will have to battle chimneys and drops. But do not fear!—with strong ropes and Jack's help you can get down these without too much trouble. Once *you* are safely at the bottom, he may decide to show off some of his rope-climbing techniques. One of the most popular of these techniques is "rappelling," it seems, and there are several spectacular variations. My favorite is body-rappelling. In this method, the spelunker is braced almost perpendicular to the chimney wall; his left hand is gripping the rope near where it is tied; the rope is twined around his body and his right arm is straight behind him holding a length of rope that has come across his shoulder; the rest of the rope dangles perhaps sixty feet to the floor. If Jack is successful in his attempt at body-rappelling, he will be able to descend the chimney by alternately jumping away from the wall and sliding through the maze of rope. And, if he can do this, you must be adequately impressed,—even amazed. If, however, the rope should get caught or Jack should try to come down too fast, he will flip and descend the rest of the way upsidedown with his back to the wall. Then you must be quietly sympathetic and good at doctoring bruises and rope burns.

Finally you will be back outside in the bright sunlight, resting from all your efforts. And what kind of reward will you get for descending a ninety-foot drop without a whimper; for doctoring Jack's rope-burned hands; for providing food, and for ruining your only pair of Levis? Jack may lean back and contentedly toss a chicken bone over a bush. His wide grin will crack the mud on his face, and maybe he will say, "You know, I'm right glad you came with us. Maybe we ought to take you next time, too; you're so skinny maybe you can get through that smallest passage we just found!"







## THE THIRTY-FIRST OF JUNE

Jane Trivette

The three of them sat there on the beach, all quiet, all hot, all waiting for the something to happen, as they had waited for two days. Theo, shoulders hunched over, was sitting Buddha-style, giving close scrutiny to a blister which had developed on top of her foot where the new tennis shoe rubbed. John B., the friend, and Thad, her brother, both lay on their backs, squinting up at the sun. Earlier, Mable's youngest child had been out building a sand castle above the high tide mark—a really wonderful one with marbles decorating the turrets, and pieces of black and pink shells stuck along the walls, making it look like a bad representation of roccoco art. But Mable's youngest child wouldn't have known that, so it didn't matter. Before she went inside she wrote in the sand, "Please don't tear down the castle. Thank You." Later, a small, skinny boy in khaki shorts had stopped to read it, then had drawn two women's faces staring at each other, and at nothing, with wavy lines flowing from their heads down to the water's edge. Beside it he had written, "Long hair, isn't it?"

Thad rolled over onto his stomach, feeling an angry restlessness, and remembering another day that had been like this one. Both it and the children's writing needed interpretation that he could not give. The other day had been two summers ago, and nothing had happened, after all, except that they'd gone swimming and the feeling had gone away. Even then he'd thought the day was like the one when the Stranger in Camus had killed the Arab, a glittering day when finally all of them had stopped saying anything and had lived for a while inside themselves. The heavy emptiness then had been because of the day, he had decided, not because of the way *they* were. The heat and the little breeze made every grain of sand feel like a white-hot needle somewhere that hadn't quite stuck through the skin, but might if you moved. They had sat there until their throats burned dry, and he, if not they, had wanted to run to the ocean to drink—had sat there until his hands were sticky from sweat and salt and sand.

But this day what they waited for would come, he knew, and felt that they knew, too. Finally John B. went to sleep. Occasionally Theo would stare hard at the brown mole on his right shoulder. She had touched it many times and said it was her witch's kiss, and that as long as it was there he would be hers. Thad though,—Thad would never be anyone's completely.

Theo watched as her brother stood up and walked toward the dunes behind them—watched until he got to the top and stood with the dry brown grass blowing around his legs. With each step the fine-ground marble sand squeaked, like walking in very cold snow. He stopped for several moments and seemed to give salutation to the sea and sun, and perhaps to be conscious of his own dark form against the sky; then he came down again awkwardly and with big steps, as you must in a pile of sand. Theo poked at John B.'s side with her toe and said an empty, "C'mon." Any human sound seemed far away and harsh that day, as though it had been shouted down a long hall. Other times Thad had walked ahead of Theo and John B. and left shells behind him on the groins, more for his sister than for her friend, in a silent, perfect communion. But today the three walked together, each still alone, caught within himself.

A white-grey gull touched his wing tips in the waves off to the right, and the three stopped to look. Far down the beach, as you could see, there was a squall being blown toward them, still so small and dark that weekend tourists might not even see it or know what it was. Together they climbed the dunes and sat to watch it pass. The wind, after the desert-dry day, made goose bumps, and when the rain came, it was in small, hard drops that beat into your skin and made you want to rub away the sting. When the cloud had gone they walked back to the castle, but found it now no more than a mound of marbles, sand, and shells, shapeless as a dissolving sugar cube. The women, too, were gone.

But in the still-wet sand a new message had replaced the children's:

"I came, though you weren't here, and I will not come again. Hearts are not forever silent, but now I ask for peace—this will be my requiem."

The stick with which it had been written was lying a little way away. Leading toward the water a pair of small footprints were drying in the sun.

On the next groin, a man stood, shading his eyes and looking up and down the beach. Finally he sat down as though to wait.

# The Figure a Poem Makes

Martha Huntley

Robert Frost, discussing poetry, talks about “the figure a poem makes.”<sup>1</sup> The use of the word “figure” implies that the poet in creating a poem is part designer, part mathematician. To say a poem “makes a figure” is to say the poem itself has life, is organic, is capable of surprising the poet as well as the reader. To Frost, a poem unfolds organically, as a bud blossoms, from the mood which first committed the poet to the last line.

Frost is quite specific about how a poem make a figure: “It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.”<sup>2</sup>

Almost all of Frost’s poems make figures. The poem *Desert Places* is typical of Frost, both because of its figure, and because like many other poems of his, it seems to be talking about nature and all the while is talking about something else. (Frost has been quoted as saying he has written only one nature poem in his life, and that was when he was very young!)<sup>3</sup>

*Desert Places* began with the poet, perhaps not in his delight, but in his reflection. It does indeed assume direction with its first line: “Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast . . .” We know that it is winter, and

we know that a person is speaking, because “fast, oh, fast” is an emotional overtone that would not be included in a purely objective description. The second line names the narrator and places the poem “in a field I looked into going past,” and the reader settles down, picturing in his mind snowy twilight and the field; feeling already the sense of isolation that one experiences in the country when night and snow are falling together. The third and fourth lines indicate that the snow is falling fast indeed, for the ground is “almost covered smooth in snow,/ But a few weeds and stubble showing last.” The poem has begun its direction. In its second stanza, it “inclines to the impulse,” and we can see the poem at work, performing, making its figure:

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.  
All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
I am too absent-spirited to count:  
The loneliness includes me unawares.

The key word has been expressed now—*loneliness* has come into the poem. We see the woods around the place, enclosing it, isolating it. Not even animals are in the field, for the snow has sent them to their lairs and smothered them there. Only the narrator is present in this lonely place, and even he doesn’t count, for he is too “absent-spirited.” Or, rather, he thinks at



first his spirit is elsewhere. On second thought, he realizes that the loneliness has included him too, before he had a chance to be aware that he was part of the deserted scene.

As the snow falls and is built up in soft layers over the field, and the night falls and becomes deeper, so, too, the loneliness of the landscape increases. Everything is working together—the snow, the night, the mood of the speaker, as the poem goes on in the third stanza, making its figure:

And lonely as it is that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less,  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow,  
With no expression—nothing to express.

What could be more blank than the unbroken whiteness of snow at night? All landmarks are covered by this whiteness that shows through it. Soon not even the few weeds and stubble of the first stanza will be left to identify the field. The field becomes anonymous, because anything that would set it apart from other places has been covered and erased by the snow, as the animals have. The field will be left like this—a white blank, “with no expression—nothing to express.” The words “nothing to express” convey not only the loss of the identity of the field, but the loss of communication. These words do double duty, then, in the poem’s figure. They describe the field, which has lost its individuality under the snow in the lonely night, and also bring the poem back to the narrator, because, by association, when we read the words “nothing to express” we think of people rather than of fields.

Sure enough, the next stanza brings us back to the speaker, and we know for the first time, really, that the poem is not about fields, or the outdoors, but about the loneliness of men:

They cannot scare me with their empty  
spaces  
Between stars—on stars where no human

race is.

I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

Reginald Cook, in his excellent book, *The Dimensions of Robert Frost*, says that the intention of the poem is to show us that “human loneliness is not to be compared with the non-human vacuity of interstellar places.”<sup>4</sup> But I think that Frost is showing us that human loneliness is to be compared with the “empty spaces between stars” and “on stars where no human race is.” If no comparison was intended, the comparative loneliness of man and the cosmos would not be mentioned, certainly not within the close quarters of two lines. The two kinds of loneliness are to be compared, and the speaker feels that the intense loneliness of the human kind of desert place is scarier than even the loneliness of the unoccupied universe.

The poem begins its figure with snow falling in a field, “runs a course of lucky events” by proceeding from the scene described to the feeling it arouses in the onlooker, and ends up by expressing the relation of personal loneliness to the loneliness of the universe itself. Line by line the poem has unfolded, organically and naturally, making its figure. The poem has, as Frost says a poem should have, “an outcome that though unforeseen was pre-destined from the first image of the original mood . . . finds its own name as it goes and discovers the best waiting for it in some final phrase at once wise and sad.”<sup>5</sup>

The figure, says Frost, “begins in delight and ends in wisdom.”<sup>6</sup> *Desert Places* certainly does that, beginning with a picture of snow and twilight in a country place, and ending with the sad truth that, however lonely the earth and heavens may be, man can be lonelier still. We admire not only the figure the poem makes, but the figure the poet controlled by using the right words, and using them within the convention of rhyme and meter to tell us so precisely of the loneliness of the human mind.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," *Discovering Modern Poetry*, edited by Elizabeth Drew (New York, 1961), p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>3</sup> Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Reginald Cook, *The Dimensions of Robert Frost* (New York, 1958), p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

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## TAG

I stood quite still and closed my eyes,  
And held my breath, and wrapped my arms  
Around myself so tightly that for a moment  
The world slowed down and I almost caught myself.  
But just then a sand crab scurried across my foot  
And my eyes opened, my lungs exhaled,  
My arms released, my legs trembled  
And I sat right down and cried.

—DEE WEDEMEYER

## THE SWEETEST FISH

Angela Williams

We spent every summer on the lake. Cabins-for-two were staggered around the edge of a cove, and the large mess-house was right in the center. All were painted army green, and looked quite at home among the tall pines that lined the shore. In each cabin were two built-in beds, an unfinished table in between them, and a naked light bulb overhead—nothing more. The mess hall consisted of an enormous screen porch lined with old rocking chairs; inside, a rustic table that could seat twenty, a large open fireplace, and windows all the way around the room. A doorless doorway led to the kitchen, almost as big as the main room. Everything in it was kingsize—the big black stove, the two-doored icebox, the tall wooden cabinets, even the pot and iced tea glasses. But maybe it just seemed that way, since I couldn't have been more than seven at the time of this particular tale.

Eva and the kitchen seemed to go together. She was big and buxom and needed plenty of room to do her “turnin” in; and at Wampee she was in hog heaven. “I gota cold do some turnin’ dis mornin’ to git breakfust on da table befo’ Caum’ Busta gits back!” she said almost every morning. Time: six o’clock, sun well on its way up. This morning, as usual, Eva kept glancing out of the window over the sink that looked on the dull grey-green water. An aluminum speck rounded the bend. “Oh, lawdy! He’s done comin’!” and she started to turnin’s twice as fast—or so the increased shuffling, slamming, and banging made it seem.

As I sat there on a high stool listening to the grits pop and watching the beads of paraffin perspiration appear on Eva’s black forehead, it seemed that the day was half gone. And it was, because a whole ‘nother day would begin after nap-time. Besides, Eva and I had already done a lot since four o’clock. Mommie wouldn’t let me do it *every* morning, but pretty near. Going to bed was much easier knowing that when the first strip of yellow light crossed the foot of my bed, I would be getting up and going fishing with Eva. (‘Course Daddy had left while it was still dark.)



Rubbing crusty sleep from my eyes with one hand, and clutching a thin bamboo cane with the other, I waited as Eva checked our hooks. Barefooted, Eva and I made dents in the sand as we walked toward our favorite corner of the pond. In a rusty peach-halves can were the worms we had dug up under the crowded pines the evening before. Most of the digging Eva had done, but I put in the black dirt for them to squirm in, and just before bedtime I got to sprinkle the can with water so they wouldn't feel like sandpaper when we put them on the hooks. (The first time I drowned 'em all, but Eva taught me better.)

We stood about ankle deep in the still water. Cool mud oozed between my toes. I shivered. My fingers fumbled several worms until I found an unstretched, "juicy" one, as Eva would say. The sharp silvery hook easily pierced the head of the wiggling worm. I pushed the rest of the corrugated, pinkish brown body down, and around and up until it formed a perfect crook. There was barely a ripple as I placed the unleaded line in the water.

This morning I *meant* I was going to catch a fish big enough to cook! So far I had had to throw back every baby brim I caught because Eva said that "Jesus wouldn't hear of fryin' 'um so young."

My red and white cork rode the small swells and bobbed every now and then. A nibble—I jerked the line. Out came my hook, clean as a whistle or covered with slimy grass. Meanwhile, Eva had strung about six hand-sized brim, and they lay in the edge of the water. Occasionally a helpless flap splashed my legs.

Finally, the sun got so bright that the glare kept me from seeing my cork sink, and my meek jerk came only after what felt as if a whale had time to swallow worm, hook and all. Once on shore, the slick brim measured only four inches long, but to me, it was a monster. Eva was just as carried away as I was. *This* one was big enough to eat! We quit right then, and hurried to the kitchen. Daddy would eat my fish for breakfast this morning!

I still don't know if he ever figured out how Eva got breakfast done so fast, but within a few minutes after he came in with his string of fish, Eva had everything ready to serve. You see, Eva had already scaled and cleaned all her fish—and mine, *this* day—so all she did was plop them in a pan of hot grease and take them out in a minute—sizzling, Indian brown, and crisp. All the time Daddy probably thought he was eating *his*!

Anyway, this morning I was especially interested in the fixing of breakfast. I craned from the stool and watched my fish float shallow in the grease. The corn meal gradually turned tan. Daddy would just love it! I could hear him on the porch whistling to the bob-whites, as he did every morning—just waiting for Eva to call from the window, "Okay, Captum' Busta."

I waited for him to come in and sit at the head of the long table, then I raced in with my fish on a plate. "Daddy, look! All by myself! *You* eat it!" I piled it on the platter with the other fish Eva had already taken in—on top. Like that you couldn't tell it wasn't *quite* as big as the others. Then I scooted back to the kitchen to eat with Eva. Daddy called for more milk, and shouted how good the fish was. Eva kept saying to me, "Yep, your'n was the sweetest of the lot. Could tell by the way the tail curled—that's a sign of a *real* sweet

fish!" My cheeks flushed from the steamy grits, the warming sun that poured in the window, and pride.

Later, the breakfast over, Eva called for me to bring her the tray. I jumped off the stool, grabbed the steel tray, and lugged it where she was scraping the plates. Trying to help, I picked up an unused spoon and started to put it in the drawer, when I turned around and saw the large white platter—bare except for crumbs of crispness and two small fish, one with a curled tail. I dropped the spoon and darted to Eva. Clutching her swollen knees, I cried, "He never even *ate* it!" Tears poured while Eva patted my shoulder roughly. "Well, be dog if he didn't miss the sweetes' one! Come on."

In the kitchen Eva took a knife and split the fish longways. The exposed bones were perfectly arranged. She lifted out the strong backbone and placed the halves of the fish on two small plates. I sat immobile on the stool, eyes flooded. With her huge fingers Eva picked up a section of white meat and put it on the rough tongue that came out gracefully between her smooth, full lips. "Umm *um!* Jes like I said, sweetes' fish in the lot—Op'n ya mout." I did, automatically. But didn't chew. Eva kept picking, chewing, licking her fingers, and talking with her mouth full about how sweet my fish was. Somehow my jaws started moving and the next thing I knew I had grease from ear to ear. At last I sucked each finger separately, and I looked up at Eva. For a moment her black and white eyes stared at me hard from under raised brows. My sticky fingers reached for her neck; she swooped me up to her broad shoulders. Trying to dodge the light-string overhead, I smiled to hear her say again, "Yes, *suh*, that sho' was a sw-e-et tastin' fish!"

## Villanelle

There's nothing here for us to keep;  
Our laughter deadens with the day.  
The darkness echoes till we sleep.

The hills which lead to dreams are steep;  
We shepherd words that run astray.  
There's nothing here for us to keep.

Rivers downhill do not run deep,  
But low are the things we cannot say;  
The darkness echoes till we sleep.

We cannot see what's there to reap,  
Though somewhere grain turns gold today;  
There's nothing here for us to keep.

Uphill at sunset shadows creep  
Like those which now between us stay.  
The darkness echoes till we sleep.

And lying here I will not weep  
For all that we have seen decay;  
There's nothing here for us to keep,  
The darkness echoes till we sleep.

—SHERYL OWENS



# The Peace We Take

A morning has come out of last night's storm.  
The wind, done with tearing blossomed boughs  
Of apple trees more used to keeping the house  
Screened in with color safe against the warm  
Dust of the street and sight of noise, has worn  
Itself to air so easy, old men drowse  
In it, sitting as they have before in rows  
On benches, in the town where they were born.

Of this or any storm to which we wake  
At night, its violence made stronger by  
What darkness hides of trouble-makers there,  
Not much is seen except the peace we take  
When sunlight pours its crystals on the high,  
Wracked limbs of trees not seeming now to care.

—SHERYL OWENS

## No Pity

No pity for this child standing alone  
Who leaned his crutches at the open door  
And makes slow steps across the polished floor  
With happiness so carefully held his own  
Fall would not wholly break it; while the tone  
Of us who watch asks nothing safely more  
Than that our watching wait as surely for  
Him now, as does the strong hope he has shown.

Hope is a balance small alarms destroy,  
A slow breath held too long, a betraying sigh  
That weighs the moment for what consequence  
It is and proves itself to be, when joy  
Not daring quite to dream, cannot deny  
A smile, lest dreaming die of abstinence.

—SHERYL OWENS

# The Makers of Honey

Airplanes drone  
through the sky at midnight  
like great bees flying into  
forsythia blossoms  
when both are golden with  
the sunlight on them.  
Outside,  
night does not oppose the day  
but seems to say the search for nectar  
leads to other flowers.

—SHERYL OWENS



## ALEX

There are no ways to tell who Alex was,  
Or why, who kept the winter rink for years,  
And flooded ice so smooth it gave no pause  
To children's running skates, or even fears  
Of hard ice if they fell. For he was there  
To brush off snow, to laugh away what tears  
Were left to freeze our cheeks with brittle air,  
And lead us to the warming house which years  
Have not destroyed: for I remember where  
Its wood stove stood beyond the groaning door;  
How thick wool socks our mothers made us wear  
Were caught with flecks and chips from its rough floor.  
And some cold nights I hear the reeling bars  
Of old songs Alex Gladju flung to stars.

—SHERYL OWENS

## TRIOLET: THE QUARREL

So sudden was the end in what she said  
That watching her he could not speak at all  
But saw without surprise the sun flame red,  
So sudden was the end in what she said.  
The earth shrugged off the sun like something dead  
So soon and swiftly did the darkness fall.  
So sudden was the end in what she said  
That watching her he could not speak at all.

—SHERYL OWENS

## CONTAINMENT

The garden stays within its walls  
But clambers upward till it falls  
In flowered vines like one of those  
Pale fountains which the sunlight shows  
And separates in sprays of pink,  
While on the air some petals sink  
To earth now gently spiked with grass  
On which the fluted shadows pass  
Of mockingbirds that call till sun  
Has gone away where wind has gone.

—SHERYL OWENS



## Deceptive

Do you remember how at last I told  
You everything I had not come to say?  
The words I thought of then, I'd speak today  
If you were here. I wonder that the old  
Remembrances so easily unfold  
When winter changes light over the day;  
Knowing ice has covered summer is no way  
To foretell spring, nor does it change the cold  
That burns a season cut away by frost:  
Thin lines of trees against an empty sky.  
And whether you see any color there . . .  
Or if you hear some stranger bird give cry  
In all the whitened worlds that are not crossed  
By other paths than this, I will not care.

—SHERYL OWENS







# World War II

Marion Rogers

Mrs. Rogers is a 1962 graduate of Queens.

*Tell all the truth, but tell it slant . . .*

Emily Dickinson

Absolutely nothing equals the glory of a small town high school senior, a big frog in a little puddle, whose every action is a splash. Three of us, in that happy state, went around together to football practice, the skating rink, and "Billy's"—all the places girls like because boys like them first. The 1939 summer before our senior year, when we were really seniors but still not pushed out in the world, was a period of time that hung suspended, like a collage, and slowly turned around and back for our admiring inspection. That *was* a summer!

Every afternoon we'd talk about what we were going to do, as we'd lie on the shore at the Sandbanks, the movie name given to a wide place in the river. We'd flop on our stomachs, gouge holes in the sand with our elbows for our bosoms, and bake evenly under the constant sear of the summer sun. College was near enough to be pleasant anticipation but not wrenching separation, and we were pleasantly vague about our plans. We were all in love every few weeks, and still hadn't exhausted the list of football players and class officers. Canton was a very non-caste town, so there was no keeping up with the Joneses. We were *all* Joneses. I loved every lazy minute of it.

During one of our afternoon discussions, we began working up enthusiasm for a camping trip to Lake Meacham, an Adirondack lake not far from us—with a cute lifeguard. We planned our wardrobes—decided whose shorts would look best with whose blouse, giggled over packing one toothbrush

to save space, and plotted telling arguments to refute the parental objections we were sure would come. They did, and our best arguments were straws in the wind. When all hope seemed gone, one of the girls' mothers, in what I now know to be a magnanimous gesture, agreed to chaperone us, if we would wait until the last week in August. The frost is practically on the punkin at that time in my country, but who could quibble? And the days glowed on.

The camping trip *was* fun—the lifeguard had a couple of friends, and that put the frosting on the cake. Every morning we swam out to the raft—I swam out there last summer and they seem to have moved it out by about a half mile—but then it didn't even call for heavy breathing. Adirondack late August mornings are teeth-chattering, and the low fog that wisped around the raft was slightly less than comforting, but at seventeen, who cared? We never lingered—sun-bathing came later—but swam back in, and with the ingratiating condescension of teenagers, obligingly ate the campfire bacon and eggs our Job-like chaperone had fixed for us.

One day we poled around the lake on a raft. I fell off, I remember, and by nearly drowning, got everything wet but the lunch. Near the lake was a moose preserve. But, why “preserve” I don't know, since in all my visits to the place I have seen only one moose—when the lifeguard canoed me up a little spring-fed stream. And with him in the stern, who looked at a moose? So you might say I've *never* seen one. Anyway, we decided to climb De Barre Mountain, which is in the preserve, early in the morning, so as to look at the sunrise from the ranger's tower on top of it. He had agreed to let us sleep there the night before, but of course our chaperone squelched that delightful prospect.

September first was awfully darn cold in the pre-dawn, and the warm sleeping bag seemed much more inviting than hauling ourselves up the mountain. But we enthusiastically gushed about what fun it would be—and made it, too, in time for sunrise. Some sunrises are pink, but this one was liquid and gold and consuming. Usually there is a wind in a ranger's tower, but this morning there was no wind, no haze, just a suffusion of gold. Not a pine needle escaped the gold bath. We were quiet and watched the way the light changed on the water, on the trees, in the sky. Our ranger friend spoke first: “Well, the fireworks have started!” I thought he meant the sunrise, at first, and looked quickly around, feeling very foolish as he continued, “Yes, the Germans have marched on Poland. Just a matter of time before we're in it up to our necks—probably not more than a year, year and a half!”

The walk back down the mountain was knee-trembling, as usual, but we didn't notice it much, we were so busy discussing what the ranger said: war, what it might mean, and it all came down to the horrible thought that there might not be many boys in our entering college class, after all. Calamity worse than this we could not imagine. But we had grown up between wars. All we knew about World War I, besides history book accounts, were too-tight uniforms in American Legion parades, and the three minutes of silence we had to observe in every classroom at eleven

o'clock on Armistice Day, November 11, when the last shot of World War I was supposed to have been fired. There have been so many intervening wars, police actions and whatnot since then, that the speeches in the park have been foregone, the three minutes of silence is a thing of the past, and Armistice Day itself has been renamed Veterans' Day. Then, though, it was strictly observed, though its significance was lost on us. Some of us only worried about our stomachs' growling in that three minutes of silence. Eleven o'clock is awfully close to lunch!

So that was the beginning of my senior year. I still had no idea where Pearl Harbor was, Heil Hitler was a gesture we practiced on overbearing teachers, and so far, nobody had left for the service. Nearby war maneuvers were simply a curiosity, and nice girls still didn't date soldiers. But, as all the then current teen-age novels read, "Little did she know what was in store for her." The fireworks had begun—and I first heard about them in a lookout tower at sunrise.

\* \* \*

Valory and I were in Canton—my home. It's still my home. Emory had been shifted here and there, and in all this time had seen Valory only once, when she was nine months old. Well, twice, if you counted the time he came home for two hours and had to go right back. That was when Valory and I first came home from the hospital. He had appeared in the middle of the night, and after just looking at the bundle of blankets and warmth in the little crib, had told me what we were going to do.

"We're *not*," he said firmly, "going to spoil her. Now, if she cries, it's normal and we'll just remember that, and unless something is really wrong, let's not pamper her—Valory." There. He had got the name out.

There was a stir in the crib. A fist moved, and a wail began to build up. Six feet two inches of sensible parent bounded across the room. "Is she *o.k.*, do you think? Don't you think you'd better *burp* her,—or whatever you do?"

I lay in the dark laughing, and I remember laughing, and I remember thinking the tears running into my ears felt hot.

\* \* \*

"Dam Neck? That can't be right! But it is. Oh, I *wish* Emory would write more plainly! Dam Neck, Virginia. I just don't believe there *is* such a place!"

The letter had said he was being sent to Virginia as an instructor. Emory sounded as if he didn't think that would be so great. It made us both happy that we could finally live together, but I felt sick at my stomach about leaving home and taking Valory from the only place she had ever known,—one she had already loved and basked in. Dam Neck!

One way to settle it—I plopped Valory in her stroller and wheeled her downtown. This was always a hazardous expedition because she always waved and called “Hi Daddy!” to all men in blue uniforms. There was a V-12 unit where we lived, so, well, you can imagine. Down to the corner I pushed the stroller, turned right, way down the hill to the post office. Up to the window.

“Hi, Clarence. Say, I have a letter from Emory that says he is being transferred to—well, it looks like Dam Neck, to me! Can you tell?”

It was Dam Neck. There *was* such a town. “It’s near Norfolk,” he said. Closer, really, to Virginia Beach. “And say, are you going there?”—Lucky. You’ll be right on the ocean! Lucky.

\* \* \*

Winter in Virginia Beach in 1943-1944 should have been a pretty gloomy thing, and in many ways it was. Sky, ocean and outlooks all were bleak. The battle of the North Atlantic was still a grim thing. The too occasional oil slick and wreckage on the beach always gave you the same lurch of stomach, and smoke concentrations on the horizon the same sweet-sick dread. Enemy submarines had been sighted. I never saw one while we were there, but I was always afraid that I might. The beach itself was one preparation after another: airplanes, guns, underground communication centers with a rat-maze of wires, gunnery ranges, and the last outpost—a rehabilitation center for wounded soldiers, at Fort Story. That was the worst reminder of war—worse than the oil slicks. War was new to our generation, except from second hand World War I accounts, and even though we were in the thick of stateside war now, it was still hard to believe. Not after you met a boy who was being rehabilitated, though. An All-American football player whose kicking toe had been cut off at the knee, or a big man on campus with half a face left. I am still haunted by the look in one boy’s eyes. We were swimming at the beach, and I dove into a breaker the way you do so you can ride it in to shore. This time I hit something—it turned out to be someone. We both came up laughing, but his laugh died as he realized that I hadn’t known he had no ear or jaw, but was just a masterpiece of metal and skin graft. Of course I quickly made some laughing comment about the wave, but he knew I had found out what he had forgotten for a minute, and he turned around to go on with his own war within a war.

Jokes about shortages, rationing—I think air was the only unrationed thing—filled the surface conversations that covered wondering about where we’d be next. Maybe drills for aid raids proved the best sources for jokes. We had to paint half the headlights of our cars black—if we could get tires for the car, or gasoline, or for that matter, paint for the lights! And then during a drill, we turned everything off and groped. All black eyes were explained by air raids, all misplaced lipstick or rumpled hair, and the funniest air raid admonition of all: don’t light a cigarette. Funny, because nobody



ever *had* a cigarette!

So the whole thing should have been almost manic-depressive—but it wasn't. If armies march on their stomachs, wartime army marriages lived on their sense of humor. One other thing. Those of us at the beach were happy just to be together. So many we knew had been separated by an ocean, or continent, or both, and too often the separation became permanent.

At Christmastime this made us feel especially lucky. Of the twenty Christmases we have spent together, it is the Virginia Beach Christmas that really crackles in my memory. We weren't bothered, first of all, with the Christmas card problem. All unnecessary mail was supposed to be shelved, so that solved domestic cards. We wrote, instead, V-mail to the fellows we knew—and many we didn't—overseas. Christmas presents? Well, we were stumped. Not only would we not get anything if we could, but we couldn't if we would. I hit upon the happy idea of making bags of prepared recipes—all the dry ingredients mixed together and what to add, with quantities, printed on the side of the sack. This was a great idea because all the wettish things you had to add were rationed, while flour and things like that weren't. This was before the day of cake-mixes, so it is with financial regret that I recount this story of the cake-mix Christmas. Every time I see a Duncan Hines cake-mix box, I think "Huh!"

Then we had gift paper problems. Wartime is a great equalizer. For rich or poor, the gift paper was exactly the same: just a memory. We ended up wrapping our packages in the gray paper that parts are wrapped in at a naval base, and sealing them with masking tape, courtesy of the United States Navy. And the tree? Well, Virginia Beach abounded in scrub pine, so that was no problem, but we had no ornaments at all. It just doesn't seem possible that there was nothing, but when you stop to think of it, we would hardly be likely to find *Made in Japan* tree baubles when we were at war with Japan, and of course our own factories were far too busy with airplane gears and vital cogs to bother with anything so trivial as Christmas tree ornaments. So there we were—one scrub pine in a make-shift tree base. But did that daunt us? Well—yes. But not for long. And I still think that was our prettiest tree. At the tip of every branch, we tied Valory's hair ribbons, and then I clipped my earrings here and there. Bare spots were camouflaged by the necklaces of the rhinestone era, and they glittered beautifully.

This was Valory's first Christmas that would mean anything to her, and she thought it was all delicious. Her favorite package, though, was a little cart of blocks, lovingly sawed and sanded by a grandpa that missed her. My Christmas present from Emory was a delight, too. You couldn't buy baby carriages or strollers, of course, and the old wicker one someone had resurrected for Valory was positively ruined by Railway Express when we went to the beach. "Don't you know there's a war on?" was the constant—and infuriating—explanation of everybody for everything. Daily I had wished for a stroller, and this Christmas morning Emory wheeled in the wicker horror, all painted battleship gray, and all fixed up with wooden wheels turned on a navy lathe, and navy electrical cable tires, and a navy luggage strap

safety-belt. After that, everything was an anti-climax, and we bundled Valory up in a pre-war snow suit, got on our warm high school jackets, and went for a long hand-squeezing walk on the beach, pushing the stroller and Valory ahead of us into the salty wind.

\* \* \*

I couldn't stand Mr. Tally. He and his family lived in a garage apartment next door to us at Virginia Beach. I hated him the most, because he was the head of his miserable group, but the rest of them were just about as bad. Mrs. Tally was a series of knotted joints topped with hair. Her mouth was like a slash in an uncooked top piecrust, and served the same purpose—steam escape. Junior and Bubber—well, their names speak for them. They were children and couldn't help their unlovability, but I found it hard to pass out smiles and cookies to two grubby boys whose eyes were as chilling as their father's.

The Tallys had come from heaven knows where to pick up a little loot from the teeming service men at the beach. Mr. Tally was the kind of vulture that fed on ignorance and paydays. He peddled cheap jewelry that he passed off and charged for "class." He had plastered-down hair (which marked him as shady to me from the first) and rotten teeth. If you could view him without head or feet, he wasn't so bad, because from the neck down he was slim, neatly dressed in a civilian suit—a rarity in itself—but the downward flick of your eyes would always stop with a jolt on—bare feet. Suit, tie, and bare feet. I only thought it was funny when I first saw him. That was before I loathed him.

The only member of his family who was worth knowing was Midnight, and that was, I'm sure, because he was not related. Midnight was a combination of Great Dane, and, well, I don't know. He was big and black and sleek—sleek from our feeding him, and grateful for our pats. The gratitude was twofold, for we appreciated his tongue-laps and tail-wags, too. Valory called him "Ni-Nite" and he would respond by lovingly knocking her flat with one paw, or whacking her with that huge tail. Midnight walked with us every day on the beach—or, we walked. He galumphed along beside us, and if dogs can grin, he grinned.

Mr. Tally thought I might be a soft touch for his jewelry. When I wasn't, he tied up Midnight. We'd leave for our walks, Midnight would whine, Mrs. Tally would screech at him, and, when I asked if Midnight might not go with us, screech at me. When Valory toddled over to pat "Ni-Nite," she was screeched at, too.

Finally we'd leave by another door to avoid torturing Midnight—or ourselves, and stopped feeding him except when the Tallys were gone—if they ever went. But one day I heard a chilling hullabaloo. I thought at first—and hopefully, I'm afraid—that Mr. and Mrs. Tally were killing each other. But it was Mr. Tally, killing Midnight—beating the tied-up dog with an iron chain.

"Please, Mr. Tally! Oh, *please!*" I gouged at his sleeve. He pushed me off. "Please—I'll *buy* your jewelry! *Please* don't hurt Midnight! Mr. Tally, *you're killing that dog!!!*"

"He's — my — dawg — and — I'll — do — as — I — damn — please — with him!" And he never stopped and never stopped and never stopped. I ran to the telephone and clawed for the police number.

"Sorry, Ma'am—did you say a *dog*? Well, Ma'am, we cain't do nothin' about a *dog*! Maybe try Norfolk, but most places like the S.P.C.A. air shut down now. Don't you know there's a *war* on?"

He mouthed on, but I didn't hear him. Midnight died, of course, and it turned out we were glad.

\* \* \*

"Hello?"

"Marian?"

"Yes."

"This is Emory."

I smiled. After all the years we have lived and breathed together, Emory still identifies himself by name over the telephone. Then, though, it was even funnier, for who in Virginia Beach on April 12, 1945, would be calling me up *but* Emory? There weren't very many phones, in the first place. In fact, it wasn't till years after the war that you could get a phone, unless you were practically at death's door, or had someone in your family who was. A phone graced our wall at the beach because we happened to be living in a doctor's beach house. It was a two-party phone—one ring for us and two rings for the other people.

But the "other people" was the Red Cross, so you can imagine that the two-ring system was awfully busy. It rang so often that I felt like something in a rat experiment! The numbers were so much alike that our phone often rang by mistake, too. Until I realized we were being mistaken for the Red Cross, I was a little disconcerted, to say the least, when gruff voices would ask where the nearest treatment center for venereal disease was. There was a rule, then, that if servicemen would report to a venereal disease treatment center immediately after some binge, and they still contracted V D, their pay would not be docked—and otherwise it would. This always seemed to me as senseless as having to pay income tax on gambling returns, but anyway—that's how we happened to have a phone, that's why it rang all the time, and that's why the line was always busy the few times we ever wanted to make a call.

"I've been *trying* to get you!"

"Well, you know how the phone is!"

"Um. Yes.—What d' you think about the news?"

"What news?" My mind raced to the Pacific Islands where the fighting had been so bad.

"You didn't hear? Roosevelt's dead."

"What?"

"Yeah—in Georgia. Had a cerebral hemorrhage. Tough, huh? . . . Marian?"

"Yes . . . . Emory?"

"Mmmm-hmmm?"

"Who'll be president? I don't even know the name of the vice-president!"

"I didn't either! His name's Truman, though—heard it on the radio. Honey, I have to go, but I wondered what you thought."

What did I think? I don't know. Living in war time had taught me not to count on anything—but Roosevelt was the only president I had ever really known, and I did count on him. Oh, I remembered the grim-lipped way my mother took down Hoover's campaign picture out of the window in 1932, but I was ten then, when Roosevelt had first become president, and I was twenty-three now—and he had been our president all that time. I couldn't . . . I just couldn't believe it.

\* \* \*

Memorial Day weekend marked the end—the absolute end—of the time we could stay in the house at 55th Street. From that weekend through the summer, the doctor who owned it, and his family, would live in the house. I had been hoping that wartime and the shortage of civilian doctors might make him stay in Richmond, but no such luck. Daily I pushed Valory around in her stroller, asking everyone I met if they knew of any available place. They never did. With the abundance of bases in and around Virginia Beach, and no housing on these bases, you can imagine that the demand for each rental was exceeded only by the asking price! There seemed to be no alternative to going home with Valory, but we were always hopeful that something would happen. And it did. One of the girls in the house called from Fort Story the day before we were supposed to leave, and said she had met a chaplain's wife who was looking for a couple who would live with them and take care of their five children. I gulped—*five children!*—but maybe we could still be together somehow! Captain Johnson, the chaplain, would be out directly, she said, to meet (and doubtless inspect) me. Valory was napping, but I flew upstairs, exchanged shorts for a domestic looking outfit, re-lipsticked, and assumed my best young matron look.

Captain Johnson came. I felt I ought to like him, but I didn't. He was short and square, and I caught him calculating my measurements immediately. Other qualifications seemed of secondary importance. But I shoved the misgivings aside—anything was better than nothing, I reasoned—and we moved in: crib, Valory, and clothes. I had moved quickly because I hesitated to find out very much about our new living quarters. But, now we were here, and I looked around. The house had been a lived in, loved in Spanish affair at one time, and even in its decay was attractive. I remember the unusual grass floor on the porch, the big open living room, and kitty-corner dining room. But two bedrooms! Five children! How? Well, three of the children were away from home, I learned, and Captain Johnson had



to stay at the base much of the time. Emory, Valory and I were given one room, in return for taking care of the house, children, getting the meals, and paying for half of everything. The financial bargain wasn't good, but we were still together. You could certainly overlook a lot for that. Captain Johnson was a faded Don Juan who always happened to have a few snapshots of himself to pass around—snapshots taken with a hat on to cover his thinning blond hair. He was quite good-looking, no doubt, and must have been of great spiritual help to the soldiers, with his darting “underwear” eyes, and propositional smile. His sermons, he told me, were sent out by a central office. All he had to do was read them. The wood for the fireplace, the beds, even the meat, he had appropriated from inappropriate places, and boasted about it. We were living in the center of a small Teapot Dome!

That summer I spent minimizing his passes, when talking to Emory, and maximizing my Puritanism when talking to him. I wanted to continue to live there, so couldn't run the risk of enraging Emory or affronting Captain Johnson. And where was Mrs. Johnson? Well, she was there. She was a colorless plodder, an unlipsticked drudge, who was genuinely appalled because Valory hadn't been baptized, and outwardly oblivious of her husband's conquests other than those of the mind.

Captain Johnson had a driver—a sergeant named Jimmy, who chauffeured a jeep for him just about continuously. The rest of the time he stood twisting his cap and grinning. When Captain Johnson finished up matters of extreme importance, he would say, “Well, leave us be going, Jimmy!” and the grin would fade, the cap would be plunked back on, and off they would go, master and slave.

We had a shower next to our room, but it didn't work very well, and so I often used the other one across the hall. One morning when the Johnson children were still asleep and all adults had departed, I transferred myself from the non-working shower to the good one, sans towel, robe, or slippers. Everything was fine until I reached for a towel. No towel. Then I heard the unmistakable oily voice of Captain Johnson. *What* was he doing here *now*? I searched for something—anything—to put on, and wildly thought I might have to swathe myself in Kleenex! What would I do if Valory woke up?! I peeked out of a crack and saw Captain Johnson sitting on the davenport smoking. He knew. And I knew that he knew.

So I waited forever. Really forever. How stupid! I berated myself over and over, but of course that didn't bring me a towel or a robe! Finally, I heard a shuffle of feet, and held my breath.

“Well, leave us be going, Jimmy!” a resigned voice said.

The screen door slammed. A jeep drove away.

\* \* \*

All of the gas stations on the beach were short of help, and some of the help they did have might better have been anywhere else. Servicemen had

a hard time buying gasoline. There was just so much to be sold, and why sell it to a service-man when somebody else might be a steadier customer? The philosophy was wrong, as it was about so many things at Virginia Beach, but there it was. Until we discovered Brown's, I had to drive the car to the station for what gasoline our ration tickets would buy. But Mr. Brown liked Valory, and she conveniently charmed our way into regular service, and even an occasional favor.

Our tires were pitiful. They were the tube kind. You could even see the tube, on three out of four tires! Mr. Brown put "boots" in them—a service station name for inside big patch. Once he said he'd have to start putting boots in the boots! Finally he was responsible for the ration board's approval of four new tires for our car.

But the next problem was just to find those tires. The government had rights to all rubber for the war effort, and little cared that one member out of all its personnel was communting to the base on—well, inner tubes and boots. A day rarely passed without a flat. I learned to laugh at Mr. Brown's face as we brought in the spare—and then the spare for that—and then . . . He'd shake his head. We always took Valory because we knew he'd fix it, then. She'd call out, "Daddy's tire all bokey!!" Mr. Brown groaned, and went through mock agony, and then she would say it again, and he'd do his stuff.

Well, we finally got some new tires in Norfolk, and felt so luxurious we blew almost a whole C ticket driving around. Mr. Brown didn't see us so often after that, but I used to walk over there so he and Valory could be foolish together every once in a while. The hot summer droned on. Mr. Brown continued to run his station and was even able to hire a man to help him. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with him, either, which you naturally looked for when someone of military age was out of uniform. I loved to watch the sunlight catch his gold tooth. He seemed to like his gold tooth, too.

His gold tooth—*everybody's* teeth—really caught the sun on the hot August day when Japan surrendered and the war was over. Cars suddenly appeared from everywhere to line up at gas stations, because the government had issued a news bulletin directly after the cease-fire, that gasoline rationing was over. Of course we were in the line at Mr. Brown's. Gold Tooth waited on us—danced to our attendance, really.

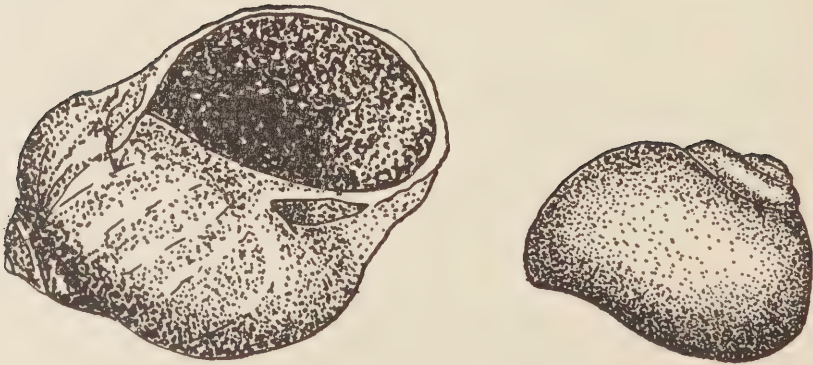
"Don't say it! Don't say it!" he grinned, but we *had* to say it. Four long years of measuring in gasoline almost drop by drop made Emory and me both say it, and we did say it—together—"fill 'er up!!" It sure sounded good.

\* \* \*

Telling the beach good-bye was hard. The rhythmic thumping of waves, night and day, had sharpened our few pleasures and half explained our

many worries, every day. We owed the ocean a lot. It was even hard to say good-bye to it at night. This night especially, when there were no stars, and although the moon was full, its light was watery suffusion that was spread too thin for meaning. The tide was out, and the lack of breeze made the ocean look like a sheet of corrugated cardboard—monotone on monotone. I watched a long time. Except for lazy washboard waves, that broke so mildly where I stood, the only movement was made by an occasional sand fiddler, streaking out in one of its several directions. I walked barefooted to the edge of the water, and let it slip over my toes, and drain away the sand under them. I'd miss the feeling of that, too, and I'd miss the trustful, happy way Valory would walk out into the surf until waves broke over her head, and I'd have to haul her back by the diaper. She loves them wisely, now.

I still have conch shells I collected then, but I don't need them. Just by saying the word "ocean" I can hear its swishes and thunders, and just by thinking of it I can smell the salt and air and fish and unknown things—like tragedy, maybe, and like love, that manages to go on in spite of it.





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